

Thirty Men and a Maid

For years Sonya Henry has roamed the world in search of bright adventure. Now she is the only woman member of an expedition that is studying the mysteries of Angkor-Vat

by GUILLES DAVENPORT

As you read this, Sonya Henry of Smethport, Pennsylvania, New York City and the Orient, is on her way to Singapore. From Singapore, she is to set out upon an expedition, into the interior of Cambodia, Indo-China, to that dark and mystic land where Angkor-Vat, ancient capital of the Kings of Kmer, hides its sombre secrets in a dank Malaysian jungle. She will be the only woman — and the only American — with thirty white men and a caravan of natives.

According to her chief, jolly, bearded Dr. Van Stein Callenfels, of the Raffles Museum at Singapore, they will find at their destination the beginnings of civilization. Angkor-Vat is still an unsounded tomb of mysteries. Scientists think it inconceivable that a center of great culture where once a million people lived, should have vanished, leaving so little trace of its essential self.

The jungle growth is rank and high about Angkor's still magnificent ruins, from which the Siamese drove the Kmers sixteen centuries ago. They conceal mysteries as inscrutable today as when they were first discovered sixty years ago. It is the task of Dr. Callenfels, this tall Viking-blond American girl and a staff of experts to find the answer to its riddle.

Sonya Henry is no stranger to the Far East or to bright adventure. She has lived alone for months on end in the Sumatran jungle and has climbed the Borobudur under a Javanese moon. Angry soldiers once chased her off the

Great Wall of China in a mid-winter storm, and alone she has walked the Arabian Desert in the dead of night. She has roamed the seven seas in tramp freighters and can mark the charts of a hundred strange ports.

Sonya Henry was born in the little Allegheny town of Smethport, of Polish ancestry. Her father was of the military aristocracy, coming to the United States in his early twenties. From him came Miss Henry's love of travel and culture and from both parents an innate mysticism which has led her to the Orient as though it were her spiritual home. From her mother, a lively, dark-haired, blue-eyed little

Photos by
L. Green from Gendreau



THE GODDESS
STILL WATCHES
OVER ANGKOR-VAT

person, she learned the trick of always looking a little ahead of life.

When Sonya was a child, the Henrys' nearest neighbor was a fascinatingly garrulous old retired sailor, and it was upon his tall tales, the music of Chopin and a diet of Marco Polo, prescribed by her father, that she grew up.

Her travels began in her late 'teens, when, to the consternation of her family, she set out across the United States with a commercial sample-trunk. Her health was bad and she had had an operation which, the doctors said, would leave her a cripple within a few years. Hence she determined she would lead her own life, however short it might be. Then — within a few short years of each other — her parents died and, with no home, she kept on traveling.

There is, she says, something mystically compelling about the urge which has driven her from place to place. From the time she was a little girl, a series of contacts with men and women interested in far places and the mysteries which perplex mankind — scientists, travelers, philosophers — have convinced her that she is destined for a life of adventure.

Imagine a child of twelve being told by an eminent anthropologist that her head was the head of a Cro-Magnon, "a refugee Atlantean," a head veritably descendent from the world's first culture. A few years later Frederick Weber, the portrait painter, told her that



Photo by Lozanich

SONYA HENRY AND SOME OF HER TROPHIES

her hands were those of the women of ancient Egypt. Upon one occasion a Hindoo followed her through the streets of Benares begging to study her hands more closely, because he said, "They are the hands of one of destiny."

She has just returned from two years in Northern China, living close to the natives, avoiding all contact with her own race, learning the language of the people and studying their history and philosophy.

She has come to believe in those things which some seem to bring out of the Orient when they return — that many of us have lived before and bring into this life the wisdom of other ages and other peoples, and that some will live again and even again. She believes that even the least of men is "destined" for his work and that none may avoid this destiny. Jungle heat, loneliness and danger are of little avail against such a philosophy.

A few years ago she went into the heart of the Sumatran jungle and there lived alone, her only white acquaintances the doctors at a Dutch leprosarium and her daily companions the natives of the region. She travels on tramp steamers or accommodation freighters whenever possible and is happiest when she is the only passenger aboard. It was on one such trip — on a freighter crossing the Indian Ocean — that she met Dr. Van Stein Callenfels. It took days to persuade him to allow her to accompany his expedition to Angkor, for that doughty explorer had never before allowed a woman such a privilege.

She knows the African and Indian jungles as well as she knows the Manchurian plains, the Indo-Chinese interior and the river ports of the muddy Whangpoo. And of all the sights in all her travels, two remain highest in her memory — the lights of Tunis from a freighter's deck and a red sunset on the Indian Ocean.

She has ridden pirate-infested waters to the inland ports of China, where a white woman is almost an unprecedented sight and has come to measure men in their importance as the Orientals do — the scholar first, then the farmer, the artisan and, finally, the merchant.

As to her part in the Cambodian expedition, she expects to be charged with the assembling of data on the findings of the experts and to help in its interpretation.

"Searching out ancient places and ruins and witnessing the unearthing of a lost civilization," she says, "is the highest of all privileges. To understand the present we must know of the past because we are all a part of it."

THESE RUINS HOLD
THE SECRET OF A
LOST CIVILIZATION

